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SUBJECT: SEPTEMBER 25 MCNS FOCUSES ON BASRAH SECURITY,
CHOLERA OUTBREAK, AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

REF: BASRAH 88

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih led focused discussions at the September 25 Ministerial Council for National Security (MCNS) on Basrah security issues, the cholera outbreak, national reconciliation, and a proposed intelligence exchange on al-Qaeda operations with Algeria and Morocco. Concerning Basrah, the ministers had differing perceptions about the level of violence, but concurred on the need for a robust response by both local and national security forces. They also agreed on the need to contain the cholera outbreak which has spread from northern Iraq to Baghdad. The Ministry of Health recommends as its primary solution the doubling of the chlorine content in Baghdad water supplies. All Baghdad districts except Doura have an adequate supply of chlorine; the government is addressing shortages. The ministers confined their discussions on national reconciliation to GOI assumption of Coalition Force (CF) contracts and Iraqi legal restrictions on granting amnesty, which may hinder accepting all previously contracted personnel. The MCNS concluded with a brief update on a GOI proposal to exchange intelligence information about al-Qaeda with Algeria and Morocco. In both cases, the GOI has made overtures to GOA and GOM, but neither has positively responded. END SUMMARY.

Basrah Security - Glass Half Full or Empty?

12. (S) The September 25 Ministerial Council for National Security (MCNS) began with a spirited discussion about the security situation in Basrah. Minister of State for National Security Shirwan al-Waeli said his recent trip to Basrah convinced him that the situation there was rapidly deteriorating which required national government intervention. He claimed that "foreign neighbors" were directly interfering in local affairs and instigating politically motivated violence. He called for the Ministry of Defense to quickly complete both the reinforcement of local security forces with a tank battalion and the swap-out of the 8th and 10th Iraqi Divisions. He strongly urged the MOI to support local police with their training of new recruits and to provide badly-needed fuel for their vehicles.

13. (S) Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih said Basrah parliamentarians had recently approached him with similar concerns. He said they described the situation in Basrah as

"out of control" and alleged local police and port authority personnel were completely infiltrated by militias. Salih explained that these were their words and he was just the messenger, but he tended to believe them because they all had the same assessment and came from a wide variety of political persuasions.

13. (S) The Deputy Minister of Interior dismissed these allegations as "old problems" which already had corrective actions in place. He reminded the MCNS that the Interior Ministry had twice swapped out senior Basrah police leadership with those from other provinces and had transferred over 130 Basrah police intelligence officers to Baghdad. Minister of Defense Abdul Qadr added that deploying a tank battalion into Basrah and swapping out two Army divisions (which brought in soldiers from outside the local area) requires more time to be fully effective -- even so, violent incidents in Basrah had already gone down by almost 30 percent. MOD Qadr cited additional data compiled by both the MOD and MOI showing a significant decrease in violence in several different categories without any high visibility attacks (Reftel). (Note: Abdul Qadr did not count as "high visibility" the four shooting attacks against Basrah Chief of Police Jalil in the last few weeks. End note.) MOD Qadr also dismissed the statements by members of parliament as motivated by a government proposal to drastically cutback the 2,500 police serving in their Personal Security Details (PSD).

14. (S) The Minister of Defense turned to the future of the Basrah military commander, Lieutenant General Mohan. MOD Qadr described Mohan,s command of the Basrah garrison as only a "temporary three-month appointment" after which a permanent commander would be found. Many members of the MCNS

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expressed surprise at this statement. Joint Forces Commander Babakir told the Defense Minister it was a mistake to limit Mohan,s command to such a short term. Ambassador Crocker urged the MOD to reconsider his decision, given the difficult situation in Basrah. UK Ambassador Christopher Prentice concurred and added that General Mohan had an excellent working relationship with British forces in Basrah which they hoped would continue. Deputy MNF-I Commanding General Rollo also voiced strong support for keeping Mohan in place beyond three months, saying it was important to maintain continuity in this difficult situation. DPM Salih acknowledged these comments and said they convinced him to recommend keeping General Mohan in command at Basrah for a longer term. (Note: General Mohan was appointed to his command by Prime Minister Maliki. End note.)

Cholera Outbreak -- Will IncreasedChlorine Help?

15. (S) Concerning the recent outbreak of cholera in Iraq, Deputy Prime Minister Salih said the disease was now "epidemic and spreading" from its origin in rural Kurdistan, through the cities of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah with hundreds of infections, and was now in Baghdad with two confirmed cases. DPM Salih called for a comprehensive governmental effort to fight the disease and requested help from MNF-I and the U.S./UK embassies.

16. (S) At the request of DPM Salih, the Deputy Minister of Health (MOH) briefed the MCNS on the current situation. He noted that cholera was endemic to Iraq; this is the third outbreak in 10 years. He described the initial effort by the MOH in August to contain the disease within northern Iraq including medical assistance teams, educational programs, and a media campaign. Unfortunately, according to the Deputy MOH, those programs slowed but did not stop spread of the disease because the root cause was contaminated ground water in places that had few alternatives. He said the MOH was now focusing its efforts at stopping the spread of infection within Baghdad by doubling the content of chlorine in the

public water supply. But the MOH faced two significant problems: a shortage of chlorine in some areas and uneven chlorine dispersion within the water distribution system. This meant people close to the chlorine insertion point could be exposed to high enough concentrations to cause dental problems, while those faraway might not get enough to combat cholera. When questioned by ministers about preventative vaccines and antibiotics, the Deputy MOH responded that these alternatives had been carefully considered, but the MOH concluded that increasing the chlorine concentration in water supplies would be the most effective solution now.

¶7. (S) Deputy MNF-I Commanding General Rollo reported that the latest Coalition Force (CF) survey showed adequate supplies of chlorine available for every district of Baghdad, although there was mixed reporting for Doura (in the south part of Baghdad); but the CF was addressing the need to have the position there confirmed. The Deputy MOH concurred with that assessment and added that the problem in Doura was compounded by a lack of adequate infrastructure there. On the other hand, he said the current level of effort -- if continued -- should be enough to contain the disease.

¶8. (S) Ambassador Crocker expressed concern that rumors of an epidemic and its causes often traveled faster than the disease itself. He strongly urged the MOH to increase their media efforts so that Iraqi citizens had all the facts. DPM Salih agreed and concluded the discussion with a request that the MOH provide a complete briefing for the Cabinet on September 26.

National Reconciliation and Outreach to Former Insurgents

¶9. (S) Deputy National Security Advisor Safa opened the discussion on national reconciliation by asking the MCNS to approve his previously submitted implementation plan. DPM Salih endorsed the plan without changes and asked for comments. General Babakir expressed support saying that many tribes were ready to support the government, but the government's response had been too slow -- this plan would

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speed the process.

¶10. (S) As part of the overall reconciliation plan, Deputy NSA Safa briefed the MCNS about the process by which the GOI would take over contracts that Coalition Forces (CF) had made with so-called Concerned Local Citizens and similar groups. Even though some were former insurgents, the goal was their potential integration into government service, most likely as local police. At issue was vetting and amnesty. Because members of these groups had not been vetted by Iraqi authorities, the GOI plan called for creation of local councils/control groups which would monitor these individuals for a specified period of time. If they performed well during this probationary period, the government intended to issue a special amnesty if the individual signed a written pledge of honor. Several ministers raised objections because of current legal restrictions in hiring admitted felons or former criminals. Prior to their approving the overall plan, they wanted a legal opinion about the authority of the government to issue an amnesty. DPM Salih directed Deputy NSA Safa to obtain this legal opinion prior to resubmission of the plan to the MCNS.

Sharing Intelligence with Algeria and Morocco

¶9. (S) Regarding a proposal for intelligence sharing on Al-Qaeda with Algeria and Morocco, Director of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS) Mohammed Shahwani voiced two objections: there was no quid pro quo and neither country had responded to repeated Iraqi overtures on the issue.

Deputy PM Salih countered that Iraq should not barter information in the fight against al-Qaeda -- it was important to share the information freely. The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs agreed to approach both countries again and offer an expert team to present the information. DPM Salih concurred and closed the meeting.

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